

Carpenter's Company Front Store
322 Chestnut Street and Carpenter's Court
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1398-A

HABS

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PA-1398-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CARPENTER'S COMPANY FRONT STORE

HABS No. PA-1398-A

Address: 322 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County,
- Pennsylvania

Owner -

Demolished December 1957
(last owner National Park Service: Independence National
Historical Park)

Date of Erection -

1810. Facade remodelled 1845, 1861 and 1901.

Architect -

William J. Johnston, 1845 remodelling
Collins and Autenreith, 1861 remodelling

Builder -

Materials of Construction -

Brick

Present Condition -

Demolished, 1957

Reference -

Massey, James C., Carpenters' Court, revised Edition, U. S.
Department of the Interior, National Park Service, type-
script, Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction.

In the early years of the Nineteenth Century, the Carpenters' Company lot on Chestnut Street grew in value and commercial importance. This, combined with the poor condition of the existing Fawcitt house(1) led them in 1810 to erect a large new store on their Chestnut Street frontage.

"The com^e appointed at the last meeting of the company to draw a plan and estimate for a front house and to inquire into the state of the funds beg leave to report that they have performed that duty and present their plan with the estimate for completeing the same which they believe will not exceed seven thousand dollars exclusive of any vaults....."(2)

The Company quickly put this new building * * * * * under construction finishing early in 1811. It covered the entire 26' frontage on Chestnut Street and stretched back to the New Hall at the rear of the Court. The "Front Store," as it was called, was in two sections * * * * *. The front part was 26'x44' and four stories high, while the rear was 19'6"x27', and three stories high. The building was quite a stylish affair in its time with arched head windows and a three-way hipped roof. * * * * *

The first story was laid out as a book store, and occupied by Brannon and Morford (5), first of a line of book dealers to rent the store. There was a large 14'x24' opening to the second floor, making a sort of balcony around the book store(6), which has since been filled in. The original line of the first floor was 15' above the ground, and this apparently was not changed(7).
* * * * *

On August 15, 1810, while the building was under construction, the Company moved to approach a Benjamin Collins who lived next door to see if he would permit the Company to tear down his adjoining party wall and then rebuild it at no expense to him(9). But a week later the building committee decided to erect a nine-inch brick wall against Collins' wall in the cellar(10), which seems to indicate that Mr. Collins refused permission to demolish and rebuild his wall. This brick wall that the Company put up is significant as there is now existing a brick wall in the cellar along the west (Mr. Collins' side) party wall * * * * *. This is one of the several indications that the building is the original 1810 construction. Under this brick wall is

a projecting stone ledge extending under the 1810 brickwork. Also, the first horizontal foot of the front cellar wall * * * * * is in stone, the rest in brick. This stonework is very old, and is laid up in clay-like mortar. We believe that this stonework in the basement is the remains of the Old Fawcitt house that was torn down to make way for this new store. We may also note that the east wall is of the same old stonework, and had windows opened in it after the construction of the wall; that is to say, they were not original with the wall. Since the building was constructed in 1810 with windows on this side, we may infer that this wall, too, is from the old Fawcitt house. These windows were probably bricked up in the 1861 restoration.

The building's first important alterations came in 1845 when the Carpenters' Company commissioned William Johnston, the architect of the Jayne Building, an early "skyscraper," to modernize the store and put on a new store front. (11) These alterations were carried out in the succeeding year. Rae's Chestnut Street view of 1851 shows this new store front, along with the original upstairs facade * * * * *. In addition to these alterations, the upstairs was "...treated to a coat of mastic by way of giving it a modern brown-stony appearance." (12) This was probably done at the same time as the store alterations.

In the store itself, a flight of stairs was constructed on the west side of the building and a cellar door was opened in the front of the building. * * * * *

1. CC. Minutes of Managing Committee 1806-12. Bd. MS.

"26 April 1809

Alphonse E. Luland is appointed to attend to the shoring up the wall of front building..."

2. CC. Antiquities, Curiosities & Memoranda. Report of the Building Committee 1810.

5. CC. Managing Committee Minutes, 1806-12. Bd. MS.

6. CC. Building Committee Minutes. Bd. MS. Sept. 7, 1810.

"The chairman stated that the business of the meeting that it was to determine the opening in the second story floor. It was agreed that the opening shall be 24 feet by 14 feet at least in the opening."

7. Ibid. Bd. MS. August 15, 1810.

8. CC. Building Committee Minutes, 1810. Bd. MS.
August 15, 1810.

"The committee agrees that if Benjamin Collins will permit his party wall in the cellar to come down that he will put it up with out any cost to him B. Collins."

9. Ibid. August 22, 1810.

"It was agreed there should be a 9 inch wall built against Collins cellar wall."

10. CC. Minutes of Managing Committee. 1838-57. Bd. MS.
Nov. 7, 1845.

"On motion resolved that the plan & elevation for the alteration of the front building, no. 118 Chestnut St. [old number] drawn by William Johnston, architect, be accepted."

Further information on William Johnson in Phila. Architecture of the 19th Century, edited by Theo. White, published by the Univ. of Penna. Press; also in Dr. Robert Smith's article on the Jayne building in the "Pennsylvania Triangle" of May 1953.

Mr. Charles E. Peterson has published the following information and query about Johnson in the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, but it brought no answers:

"William L. Johnston was the architect of at least two important Philadelphia buildings - the Mercantile Library, built c. 1846, and Dr. David Jayne's New Eight Story Granite Building, 1849-50. He exhibited designs at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts and the Franklin Institute.

"This seems to have been the William Johnston born September 23, 1811, son of Philadelphia merchant Alexander W. and Ann Johnston, baptized September 10, 1812, and married to Mary Ann Seeds December 27, 1828 by the Rev. James Abercrombie of Christ Church. In any case the architect made his will September 28, 1849 and died October 17 of 'pulmonary consumption' at the age of 38. He was buried in Machpelah Cemetery just as construction was started on the Jayne Building.

"His property, which seems not to have been inventoried, was left to his widow Mary and his children. Any date on the life, architectural library or designs of Johnston would be deeply appreciated. Contemporary references to the construction of the Jayne Granite Building would also be of interest."

- II. HSP. Souder loc. cit. "...Of late years it has been treated to a coat of mastic by way of giving it a modern brown-stony appearance."

THE WEST BUILDINGS REBUILT, 1861

In 1860, the Carpenters' Company, eyeing the substantial rents that more modern buildings on Chestnut Street were bringing, decided to improve their own property on Chestnut Street, by this time well up in years. They first considered tearing down the full range of existing buildings on the west side of the Court and replacing them with a new store(1). Plans and specifications were prepared for this new building(2), to be built of brick with a cast iron or brownstone front. It was estimated to cost \$22,000 with a cast iron front and \$1,700 more in brownstone. Rentals were estimated at \$8,000 per year, which would have been a substantial return on the investment. But for some unknown reason the Managing Committee of the Carpenters' Company decided against new construction and decided instead to repair and remodel the existing buildings, for on October 24, 1860 they rented the building for \$4500 per year with the Company to bear the "expense of sundry repairs and alterations suposing to amount to about \$5,000."(3) The Company engaged Messrs. Collins and Autenreith, Philadelphia architects to do the work(4)(5). These "sundry alterations and repairs" soon added up into a major job of reconstruction(6), which finally cost the company over \$9,000.

The Front Store received a new Chestnut Street facade, done in the best Nineteenth Century concept of the Renaissance. The side along the Court was stuccoed at that time. * * * * * The height of the rear section was raised from three to four stories. * * * * * the appearance of this building has * * * * * changed comparatively little in the 145 years that it has stood.

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1. CC. Minutes of Managing Committee, 1838-57, Bd. MS.
March 19, 1856

"Before many years it will no doubt be advisable to take down all the buildings upon the west side of the court and erect on the site thereof a substantial store..."

Minutes of Managing Committee, 1857-91. Bd. MS.
March 21, 1860.

"The Com^e on improving the company's property on Ches. St. have examined the subject and are of the

judgment that it is the interest of the Company to erect a new building on the site of the present old one."

2. Ibid. April 11, 1860.

"The com^e to whom was referred the subject of improving the company's property on Chestnut St. respectfully report the cost of building as described by the annexed drawings and specifications not to exceed the amount of \$22,000 with a cast iron front on Chestnut St. and press brick front on Court, with outside iron shutters and a store erected on the plan can be rented for a yearly rent of \$8000, on a lease of 8 years..... If the front on Chestnut St. be of brown stone it will increase the sum \$1700 making the whole amt. if brown stone \$23,700.

3. Ibid. October 24, 1860.

4. Collins and Autenreith also did parts of the Lit Bros. Store on Market Street. See Philadelphia Architecture of the Nineteenth Century.

5. CC. Minutes of Managing Committee 1857-91. Bd. MS. Aug. 15, 1860.

6. CC. Minutes of Managing Committee, 1857-91. Bd. MS.

"Report the same completed the expense incurred in making said improvement being \$9273.49. This amount is more than anticipated, but the committee believe it was impossible to avoid, owing to the defective condition of the buildings. A considerable portion of which they were obliged to remove and erect in place thereof a new & substantial building."

Report by: James C. Massey, 1954
Edited and Reviewed by: Eleni Silverman, HAE
September 1983